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AUTHOR Williams, Claudette H.

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ABSTRACT

The Reading Excellence program seeks to provide a cadre of trained volunteers to deliver tutorial assistance in reading to at-risk students during non-instructional times that will result in significant improvement in student performance on reading and language arts as measured by their age-appropriate standardized tests. This paper describes the program model, noting that the model uses a technology-based tutorial program to support and enhance the tutorial program before and after students work with their tutor/teacher. The paper addresses tutor recruitment and tutor training, as well as at-risk student recruitment. It also discusses tutorial scheduling, parental involvement, program administration, and evaluating program effectiveness. (NKA)

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by Claudette H. Williams

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The Reading Excellence Program: Components of a Model for Delivering Tutorial Assistance in Reading for At-Risk Students

The goal of Reading Excellence is to provide a cadre of trained volunteers to deliver tutorial assistance in reading to at-risk students during non-instructional times that will result in significant improvement in students performance on reading and language arts as measured by their age appropriate standardized tests.

Tutorial Assistance Model

Tutorial assistance to at-risk students is a critical part of the projected success of the Reading Excellence program. This model promotes flexibility in scheduling outside of the traditional instructional periods and focuses on the one-to-one assistance for students who have been identified as needing additional support (Snow et al., p.p. 262-264). In this section of the project, tutors work collaboratively with classroom teachers to address weaknesses identified in reading and language arts. Specifically, tutors will work with students in rereading familiar stories, practicing word analysis, writing, and introducing new reading material.

Infusion of Technology

A significant aspect of the tutoring program is the inclusion of technology. According to Kamil, Intrator, & Kim (2000), students with special needs experience significant gains when technology is used to address individual needs and learning styles. As such, this program uses a technology-based tutorial program to support and enhance the tutorial program before and after students work with their tutor/teacher. This provides additional practice and review based on the customized sequence of on-line activities focused on students' unique needs. This technology-based program:

- Provides support and practice for all major components of reading, particularly phonemic awareness
- Aligns with scientifically-based tutoring guidelines
- Provides support for pre- and post-testing in phonics, leveled books (both on-line and off-line), oral reading, word work, and writing
- Provides assessment tools to help teachers track student progress and assess student strengths and needs.

Utilizing this technology-based program significantly increases the amount of one-on-one research-based intervention teachers can provide each student.

Tutor Recruitment

Tutors for the Reading Excellence project are solicited through a variety of activities, including but not limited to word of mouth, letters and flyers to community business partners, higher education partners, neighboring high schools, the public library, Parent Teachers Association, and local churches. These organizations offer the opportunity to involve intergenerational groups having a diverse knowledge base in assisting students, a situation that could be beneficial in helping students relate to diversity. Among these are sophomores and juniors majoring in education at Clark Atlanta University who are engage in service learning and students in the Federal Work Study program who are involved in community service projects through the University's *Culture for Service* Program.

Individuals interested in volunteering in this program must satisfy a set of carefully selected criteria identified in keeping with research findings from So That Every Child Can Read: A Review of Effective and Promising Practices in Volunteer Reading Tutoring Programs (1999) among others. Volunteers should:

- Have attained at least a high school education,
- Not have a criminal record,
- Be available for and willing to undergo prescribed training to equip them to perform as required
- Be willing to commit to a minimum number of hours per week per semester tutoring at-risk participants
- Be able to independently travel to and from tutoring sites as scheduled
- Submit two letters of recommendation verifying their quality of character and ability to perform duties as tutors, and
- Satisfy a panel of interviewers about their interest in and ability to work with students targeted to participate in the program.

In addition to the foregoing, volunteers are required to maintain accurate records, give structured feedback, report to tutoring sessions in a timely manner to ensure adequate preparation of instructional materials and space, and perform in accordance with training and the duties defined in their roles and responsibilities.

Tutor Training

In keeping with the Northwest Regional Laboratory's review of best practices in successful volunteer tutorial programs, training for tutors will be geared toward the needs of the students and the needs, knowledge base, and experience of the volunteer tutors (Potter et al., 1999). Training for tutors is both pre-service and in-service and is geared to accommodate tutor's varying expertise, learning styles, and schedules. The pre-service aspect of the training covers substantive content to ensure that tutors are equipped to give the assistance needed by their tutees. In service training for tutors is on going and

augmented by onsite support services. This entails the provision of an designated onsite reading specialist whose responsibility it is to observe, monitor and supervise the performance of tutors, be available for consultation, and provide assistance as needed to foster and enhance effective tutorial assistance. The onsite reading specialist also holds designated sessions to give feedback, conduct planning sessions with tutors, reinforce positive practices and recognize and reward tutors for their services.

Volunteer tutors are prepared through an orientation program and ongoing professional development activities. The orientation program seeks to familiarize volunteers with the Reading Excellence program, its goals and objectives, their roles and responsibilities, the skills needed to tutor successfully, the school culture, the multicultural composition and needs of the target population, confidentiality relating to their tutees, and the monitoring and evaluation of the program. All tutors are trained in using strategies to build students' competence in critical reading dimension areas and will use assessment reports from classroom teachers to design tutorial lessons and activities. These tutors are also trained in using students' reading styles to enhance tutorial offerings. Tutors are required to sign in and out with their supervising staff, make regular weekly reports on the progress of their tutees and participate in biweekly evaluation meetings. In an effort to ensure continuous improvement for tutees, volunteer tutors are asked to give feedback on the effectiveness of the program in meeting the needs of the students with whom they are working. They are asked to evaluate and give bi-weekly feedback to their supervisors on the effectiveness of their own work as tutors and the progress of their students. This information is used to develop training content for all groups of participants. Organizations from which tutors come are also requested to maintain records on the involvement of their representatives, continually solicit and submit the names of potential volunteers, and offer feedback from their volunteers.

Training of volunteers is further enhanced by the technology-based tutorial program which is used in this program. It provides resources for literacy and volunteer tutorial training sessions. This enhances the wealth of information and resources of classroom books that are aligned with the core curriculum, extend students on-line learning, and support state standards. These books include leveled decodable texts, as well as rich literature in natural language from diverse cultures. As a support for assessing student progress using these materials, tutors also use on-line assessment tools, including online diagnostic activities and student reports and off-line writing rubrics and running record sheets.

A resource library for tutors should be established. Here tutors will have access to the program handbook, tutor-training manual, a rich selection of children's books and consumable materials, other materials that support school standards planning, record-keeping, and assessment tools.

At-risk Student Recruitment

Students identified to be at-risk for failing in reading and language arts are the primary target to receive tutorial assistance. Classroom teachers use student performance on standardized tests to identify students needing tutorial assistance. Students with language

arts and reading scores below the national norm should be the first level at which students should be identified for assistance. Other students whose overall scores on standardized tests form the second level while students who are marginal or whose primary language is not English form the third level at which students will be identified to participate in the program.

Tutorial Scheduling

In accordance with the Reading First model, tutorial assistance should be offered after school until 6:00 p.m. as part of the ongoing after-school program; and on Saturday mornings Individual tutorial sessions should approximately 60-90 minutes. This time is should be used for direct instruction and independent supplement activities such as scientific based tutorial software related to the identified area of need. Each student is given the opportunity to register to receive assistance at least three times per week. Students having the greatest need are encouraged to register to receive assistance on a daily basis. Saturday schedules should be established to accommodate students and tutors who have the time and desire to maximize their participation in the tutorial assistance program. Tutors are limited to working with no more than three students at any scheduled time.

Parental Involvement

Parents should be recruited, trained and utilized as volunteers as a method of extending the effect and success of the Reading Excellence program. They are required to participate in the tutorial assistance program in two ways, 1) ensure that their children identified as needing assistance, attend scheduled tutorials, and 2) participate in the tutorial assistance program as tutors. Involvement by parents not only shows their support for the program, but demonstrates to their children that they are committed to academic excellence and are prepared to support ventures which will promote academic success. Parents should be encouraged to check out books from the Family Resource Center to use in the home as a way of enriching the academic resources in the home.

At the outset of each semester, parents should be informed about the Reading Excellence program, its goals and objectives and the need for their involvement and support of the program. Parents undergo similar training to that given to other volunteers in addition to training targeted to help parents become their child's first teacher, as well as to give them parenting skills to help support their children's academic endeavors. Parents should also be exposed to the Family Resource Center from which they can obtain resources in services, videos, and books to help them better perform their duties as tutors.

Program Administration

A reading specialist coordinates the tutorial assistance program. This individual should be located onsite and be available during the hours of operation. This individual should have overall responsibility for recruitment, training, and placement of tutors, planning and implementing schedules, implementing orientation and training programs for tutors, and documenting and reporting on all activities in the program. The coordinator is also

responsible for establishing a database, collecting and processing baseline data, implementing evaluation measures, and ensuring that evaluation feedback is used for continuous improvement. The program coordinator is also responsible for ensuring that tutoring sessions address and support the district curriculum and classroom instruction.

Evaluating Program Effectiveness

A plan to monitor student reading progress in the tutorial assistance program is part of the overall system to monitor student improvement in the Reading Excellence program. Student weaknesses identified in the initial referral should be maintained on file with all subsequent activity to address the weaknesses. In addition daily activity and time logs should be maintained and reviewed on a weekly basis, the results of which are forwarded to the homeroom teacher or source of initial referral. Student reading progress should also be monitored through their performance in class activity and on standardized tests.